

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, November 15, 1894, with transcript

COPY Parker House, Boston, Mass. Nov. 15th, 1894. My darling little wifie:—

Its pretty hard to carry out good intentions sometimes. It was only last friday that I wrote to you that I intended to write, if only one line, to you every day. A week have almost gone bye since then, and not one line has been written excepting by telegraph!

It was one o'clock in the morning when I went down stairs last friday to mail my note to you. As I did not suppose I would meet many people in the hotel, I did not take the trouble to dress. I only had my undershirt and trousers on! However for decency's sake I put on my overcoat and buttoned it up under my chin, and went down stairs, letter in hand, spectacles on nose, and pen behind my ear. on reaching the office I found a crowd of forty or fifty gentleman standing quite still, intently observing the hotel clerk, who with pen in hand was also motionless. Not a sound was to be heard, you might have heard a pin drop, and no one moved. One of the bell-boys looking round the corner of the crowd, was motionless too! It looked as if a magic wand had been waved over the crowd, so that every man was turned into a statue, fixed in the position in which he happened to 2 be. For a few moments, I too stood motionless, struck with astonishment at the sight. Then I pushed my way through the crowd and dropped my letter into the box at the desk. I then saw the cause of all the excitement. Two gentlemen were standing in front of the pigeon-holes in which the hotel keys were placed. One was a little man like a german waiter who had his back to me. The little man was acting in a most extraordinary way, moving one hand in an uncertain way, from box to box, as though searching for his key. The other gentleman, tall dark with cigar in mouth held him a prisoner by grasping him by one wrist, at the same time scowling at the little man without a word.

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My first thought was that an arrest was being made, my second that the little man was insane, or having a fit of some kind, and that the tall man was his keeper or doctor. The little man suddenly placed his hand into one of the boxes, and taking out a key, handed it to the other. The silence was then broken by tumultuous applause. It was a mind-reader at work.

Some one in the crowd, recognizing me, called out, "Let him try Prof. Bell". Then the little man who turned out to be a Russian of the name of Neumann, came to me, and asked me to think of something for him to do. I grasped his wrist, and thought to myself, "Take my glasses off my nose and give them to the hotel clerk".

The little man led me round and round in a 3 circle as though seeking the direction in which he should go. He then stopped suddenly, faced me for a moment, and took my glasses off my nose. He held them irresolutely in his hand as though he would ask "what shall I do with them". I said, mentally, give them to the hotel clerk, He at once turned round as though he heard my thought, and handed them to the hotel clerk!

I asked him to try again, and this time thought of a pair of gloves which I knew were in my overcoat pocket, I wanted him to take the gloves out of my pocket and give them to me. He told me to think of each step in the action to be performed separately, so that only one thought should be in my mind at one time. So while he was waltzing round and round in his preliminary gyratory search, I kept saying to myself, "Overcoat, overcoat, overcoat," (mentally alone of course). He suddenly stopped, faced me, and unbuttoned my overcoat! exposing my half dressed condition to my astonished audience! I changed my thoughts pretty quickly to the gloves in my pocket! upon which he buttoned up the overcoat again, and surveyed me for a moment, as though he were asking me a question, "In which pocket are they?" I mentally replied "In the left hand pocket". He immediately plunged his hand into the pocket, drew out the gloves and gave them to me!

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The experiments were certainly remarkable I should like to have the opportunity of investigating 4 this subject of mind-reading futher. That was last friday night or rather early saturday morning. I found my way on saturday to the Horace Mann School, by ten o'clock.

A large and distinguished audience was present. Addresses were made by Mr Supt. of schools, Mr chairman of the Horace Mann school committee, Mr Sanborn, Miss Yale, Mr Flint, Mr Mrs Weld (?), Miss Fuller and others.

Newspapers all represented. Stenographer report of everything. Board of Education has passed a special order to print the proceedings as a public school document. Good notices in all the papers, (have just seen them). Left Boston saturday evening by the through train for Washington. Called at the Mt. Vermon Seminary on my way to Georgetown. Saw Miss Hill who told me that Elsie and Daisy had gone out to Georgetown, where I found them at my father's house.

Found everyone well and blooming, excepting Louisa, whose face was blooming indeed, and not very nice to look at. She was suffering from a bad tooth, and swelled face.

Uncle and aunt well, Aileen well, saw Grace and Charlie, everyone all right. After dinner Mr and Prof. Gordon turned up, and we visited V. Bureau, magnificent building. Collections safely housed at last. Spent the early part of the evening (sunday) at the Mount Vermon Seminary. Took tea with forty or fifty girls. 5 Elsie and Daisy introduced me to their friends and we talked and sang hymns until eight o'clock. I then examined Elsie and Daisy's room, and Louise Coleman's by which time was at the door to drive me home.

Talked with Prof. Gordon and Mr in the Bureau, until eleven o'clock. Spent monday with my father and mother, and left for Philadelphia by the four o'clock train. Went to the Stratford and in the course of the evening held quite a reception there. Mr and several of his teachers came to see me, there were, Messes Kirekuff, Booth, Davidson, Graver, Taylor, and I think another teacher, not sure, Ginger ale, beer, cigars, and good spirits!

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All drank to the toast of "Dr" and "Mrs" Crouter, had very pleasant meeting. Mr Graver Editor of Silent World read an Editorial of his in which he calls the combined system, the combined "humbug"! Left for New York by the mid-night train, reached New York tuesday morning. Spent the day visiting the Wright Humasons School, and Miss Warren's school. Saw Miss Warren but not her school.

Much interested in the Wright Humasons school. They are doing a good work. Helen Keller is there. Much interested in Mr Humason's attempts to improve her voice. Guided by the piano Mr Humason sings a note while Helen feels his throat, and attempts to imitate the pitch. She knows, by touch, when her voice is in unison with his. This is a remarkable and result. She follows 6 him up and down the scale, do — ra — me — fa — etc with remarkable accuracy.

Nothing has astonished me more than this perception of pitch, by touch. His object is to lead her to inflect her voice naturally.

I should not be at all surprised to find her singing some day, for it is her ambition to sing, and if it is a possible thing for her to acquire this wit, she will do it. I had intended to go on to Boston by the night train but was so tired that I went to bed instead, and did not awake next morning (wednesday) till half-past eleven. Just had time for a good breakfast, before catching the one o'clock express for Boston. Reached Boston about a quarter before eight, but found Parker House could not give me a room until after ten o'clock, so went out to the theater, and had dinner when I returned to the hotel. Young McKeen found me at the hotel and stayed with me till mid-night. Not so sure of this think it was this morning (thursday) he called, break-fasting with me, and leaving at twelve o'clock.

Your loving husband, Alec. P. S. Met P.S. Millington Miller at Gilsey House. Criticised his Philadelphia press article pretty severely, especially his remarks concerning Prof. Fay, praised his Harper weekly article. He has promised to moderate his 7 tone. Don't trust him however. Not favorably impressed with him, a news monger, sensational writer, egotistical,

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a seeker after notoriety more than truth I am afraid, at least that is my estimate of him, at first glance. AGB.